

Hydrant Flushing and Waterline Maintenance

You may notice Water Department crews working at fire hydrants and see water running down the street. Your first thought may be that we are ignoring our own philosophy of conserving water. Normally in the spring, we flush water lines through the use of fire hydrants, which is an important preventive maintenance activity. Although it may appear to waste water, the process is part of a routine maintenance program necessary to maintain the integrity of the water system allowing us to continue to deliver the highest quality water possible to our customers.

As a result of the line flushing process, residents in the immediate vicinity of the work may experience temporary discoloration of their water. This discoloration consists primarily of harmless silt and air and does not affect the safety of the water. If you experience discoloration in your water after crews have been flushing in your neighborhood, clear the pipes in your home by running all water faucets for a few minutes.

The same philosophy of water line preventive maintenance is one that you should use in your own home to ensure the quality of water inside your home. Your home's water heater should be drained and flushed on a regular basis, according to manufacturers' recommendations, to keep it working effectively and efficiently.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why does the water system need to be routinely flushed?

A: The city's water distribution system is a complex network of pipes and storage reservoirs where sediment or deposits may naturally accumulate over time. If not removed, these materials may cause water quality deterioration, taste and odor problems, or discoloration of the water. Water may also stagnate in lesser used parts of the distribution system. This can result in degraded water quality.

Q. When does flushing normal occur?

A. Normally, flushing takes place for approximately a one month period during early spring. In an effort to cause fewer disturbances to our customers, water crews flush the lines at night from 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM.

Q. Is the Water Department the only ones that flush the lines?

A. No, Fire Departments are required to flush hydrants when they are testing hydrants to make sure adequate flow and pressure is available.

Q. What should I do when I see city crews flushing hydrants in my area?

A. If you see a city crew flushing hydrants, PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY.

Q. What should I do after the flushing?

A. If the tap water is used during flushing, it could come out full of sediment and discoloration. If you encounter discolored water, shut the water off and wait several minutes. After waiting, check the clarity by running cold water for a few minutes allowing new water to work its way into your pipes. If not, wait a few more minutes and check again. In some cases, you may experience slight discoloration for a few hours. This discoloration only affects the appearance of the water; it does not affect the taste or water quality.

Q. What should I do if my water pressure or volume seems low after flushing?

A. Check your faucet and washer screens for trapped debris.

Q. Why does the water look funny after hydrant flushing?

A. When a hydrant is opened, there will always be temporary incidences of discolored water containing fine sediment particles. There is no health hazard associated with discolored water. Allow a few hours for discoloration to dissipate. To verify the water has settled, allow your cold water tap to run a few minutes. If the discoloration persists for more than twenty-four (24) hours, please contact our Water Production Division at (828) 271-6100.

Q. Is it OK to drink sediment-laden or discolored water during temporary disturbance events?

A. It is recommended that water users wait until the water has cleared before using it for potable purposes.

Q. How is the flushing program related to hydrant testing by the fire departments?

A. The Asheville Fire Department, along with other fire departments supported by our water system, also conducts routine “flow testing” of fire hydrants. This is an important effort toward ensuring hydrant effectiveness for fire control purposes. Such testing is a separate effort independent from the Water Department flushing program and assists us with knowing if our fire hydrants are working properly.

Q. What is the silt in the water system after flushing?

A. Water contains minerals and these minerals react with the inside of the pipe to produce the by-product. This chemical reaction between the pipe and water is a normal and natural process. This process can occur on the inside of the pipe and prevent an adequate volume of water flow. The flushing process removes much of this by-product.

Q. What will happen if fire hydrants are turned on or off too quickly?

A. This will cause “water hammer”, which is a pressure surge or wave when water in motion is forced to stop or change direction suddenly. The pressure wave can cause major problems, from noise and vibrations to pipe collapse. In home plumbing, this is experienced as a loud bang resembling a hammering noise. Water Department and Fire Department Employees have received instruction on how to operate fire hydrant valves slowly to avoid water hammer.

Thank you!